

March 9, 2009

Chairman Stoker and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am seeking your support of SB 197.

My name is Penny Martin. I am an Official Court Reporter in Helena for the Hon. Jeffrey Sherlock. I have been employed in my position for 23 years. SB 197 seeks to increase 26-year-old page rates for transcripts, as well as modernize language to reflect technology and current practices of Official Court Reporters in the State of Montana.

Official Court Reporters are statutorily required to provide transcripts of district court proceedings and also provide the necessary equipment for the production of those transcripts. In exchange, a reporter is allowed to collect transcript fees. Those rates are set out in 3-5-604, MCA.

Twenty-six years ago, necessary equipment included a typewriter, paper, and transcript covers. The statutory page rate sufficiently covered the equipment costs and a reporter's time, which often included evenings and weekends.

Today a reporter is required to purchase state-of-the-art technology and equipment, which includes a laptop computer (\$1,200), a printer (\$800), a copier (\$1,000), computer-aided transcription software (\$4,500), a yearly software support agreement (\$600), insurance, paper, transcript covers, and DVD's. The cost of today's equipment has gone up considerably, yet the allowable rates remain the same. Reporters' duties have also expanded due to the utilization of modern technology, which now includes the ability to provide real-time services to the Court and also the ability to produce daily and expedited transcripts, something that was virtually unheard of 26 years ago.

The State of Montana struggles to fill Official Court Reporter vacancies. Increasing 26-year-old transcript page rates is one way to enhance the ability of the State to attract and retain competent, dedicated and professional reporters.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 197.

Penny Martin, RPR  
Official Court Reporter  
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